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Temple children back with guardians

Patricia and Paul Petit, two children involved in Peoples Temple members' custody disputes, were reunited with their legal guardians Thursday afternoon.

Private investigator Joseph Mazor said he was put in contact with the children and their mother late Wednesday afternoon after a story on their case appeared in The Progress.

Mazor had charged the temple with concealing the whereabouts of the youngsters from their lawful guardians, charges that Temple attorney Charles Garry called "an outright lie."

"The mother has those children," Garry told The Progress Wednesday. "We told Mazor the mother had those children. They are with her right now out in the Mission District."

Garry said he did not have the mother's address.

Peoples Temple also denies responsibility for children who have reportedly been sent to the church mission in Guyana, South America, without the consent of legal guardians.

"We (Rev. Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple) don't have anything to do with these children," Garry said. "How do we get involved? We are not the guardians of these children."

Literature put out under the Temple name refers repeatedly to temple foster homes and the temple rehabilitation center in Guyana.

Available evidence indicates that many if not all of the so-called temple homes were, in fact, licensed by individual temple members who often received state funds for their support.

Assistant District Attorney Dan Weinstein said parents or legal guardians who permitted their children to stay in the custody of either the temple or its members can petition to have such children returned from Guyana.

If the youngsters are not sent home within a reasonable time, the parent / guardian could then ask the courts to order the children returned, Weinstein said.

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Until and unless such a definite court order is violated, the temple practice of sending children to Guyana does not violate any criminal law, Weinstein said.

The authorities have no right to investigate conditions in Guyana unless children have been sent there by direct order of an official government agency, Weinstein said. He said the district attorney's office has no evidence that the courts have ever sent any children to the remote South American mission.

A Peoples Forum newspaper dated Aug. 1 states that some young people at the Peoples Temple agricultural mission in Guyana were sent there by the authorities.

We quote: "Kenny R. got into trouble with burglary. Juvenile hall dropped charges against him on the condition that he be sent overseas to the Temple mission." A picture of a teenager identified as Kenny Reid accompanies the story.

"Charles W. was probationed for three years on condition that he go to the Temple agriculture mission," the temple paper states.

The newspaper also makes reference to legal efforts on behalf of two adults identified as "Jerry L." and "Ruthie" who the temple says were "put on probation to the People's Temple agricultural mission in South America."

The Progress inquiry into Guyana was prompted, in part, by a May 11 letter sent to Supervisor John Barbagelata by temple member Timothy [redacted] Church, it states:

"Many judges have even turned youthful offenders over to our program as an alternative to their going to prison. Our agricultural project in South America is currently providing a new life for over 100 people who were involved in a life of crime and drugs."

Some of the "literature" describing Temple literature, have been tentatively identified as former female members from quotes or from private descriptions accompanied by first names and initials which match those of people known to be in Guyana. If these identities are correct, quite a few of the "adults" have been temple members since early childhood and their alleged criminal lifestyles would have had to be developed while they were under temple influence.

—By [redacted]

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